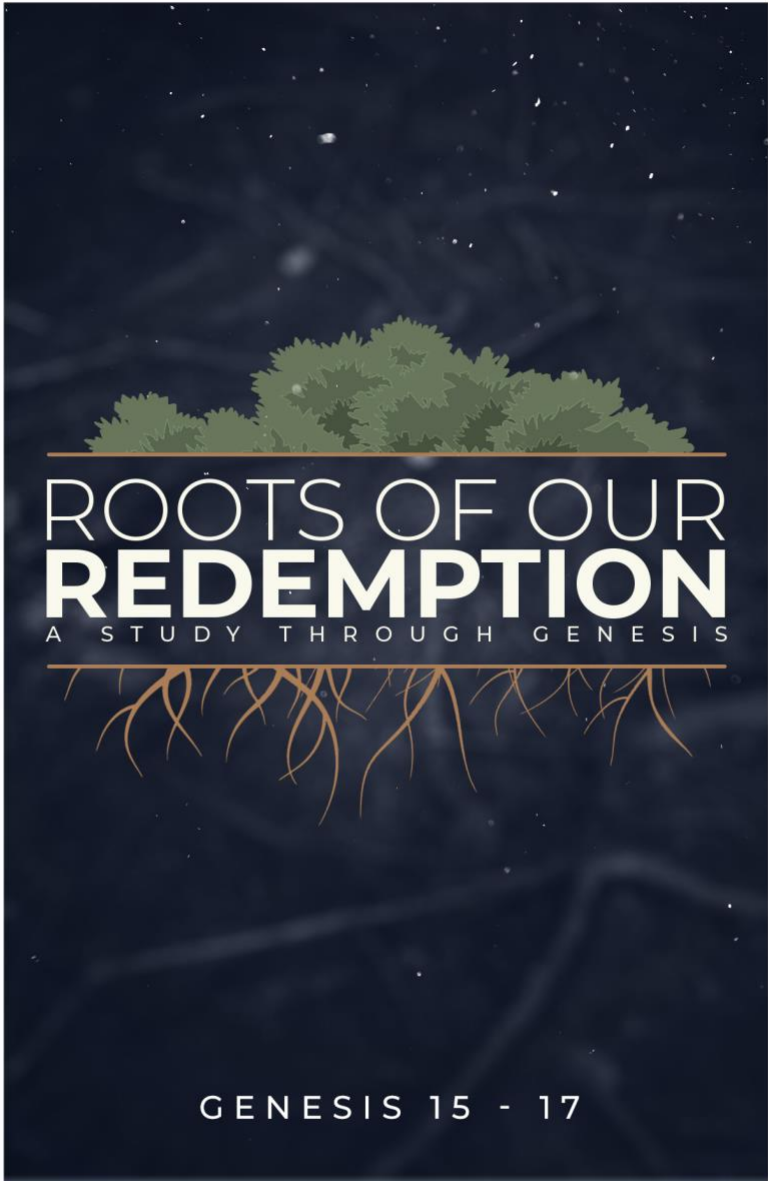




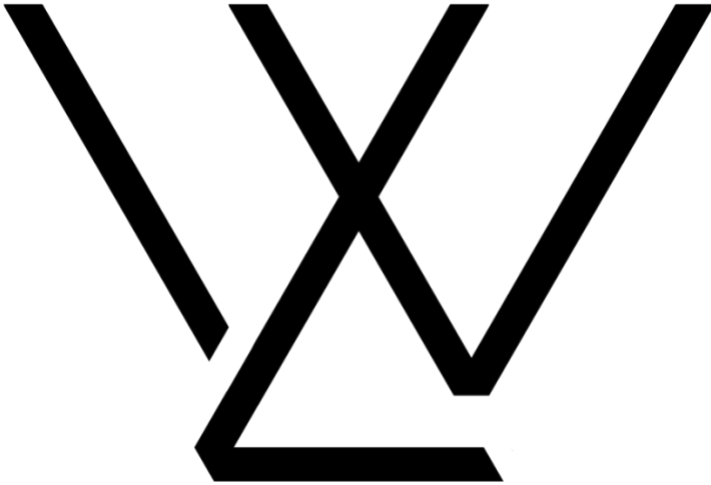
WORD TO LIFE

WEEKS 6 - 9



GENESIS 15 - 17





**Word to Life's** are sermon-aligned study guides, created to help the church dive even deeper into the passages we study together on Sundays.

Each week there will be five studies to help you prepare for the upcoming weekend sermon. This will also be a great discussion tool at your next LifeGroup meeting.

We hope you enjoy and grow deeper in your faith!

### **Contributors**

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## Week 6: Genesis 15:1-21

### Day 1: Exploring the Biblical Text

**READ:** Genesis 15:1-21

#### **EXPLORE:**

*Instructions:* Spend time reading Genesis and complete the activities and questions below.

- **Activity:** While reading, include some observations in the space below.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- **Question:** What do you notice about how Abram responded to what God said to him?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- **Question:** Why do you think God brought Abram outside to view the stars instead of simply telling him that he would have a lot of descendants?

- **Question:** This is not the first time that God promised Abram and Sarai offspring. Why do you think it is important that we read about how God reiterates His previous promises?
  
- **Question:** In verse 7 God reminds Abram that He brought him out of the land. Why do you think that would be specifically necessary to remember?
  
- **Question:** In your own words, summarize the interesting events of vv. 8-21.

## Week 6: Genesis 15:1-21

### Day 2: Rising Pressure and Rising Faith

**READ: Genesis 15:1-21**

#### **EXPLORE:**

The discussion recorded in the first verses of Genesis 15 represents a real and honest conversation between Abram and God. There are heartbreaking questions, resounding assurances, and an exemplary picture of faith amidst building pressure. The goal of today's study is to zoom out from Abram's questions and the Lord's responses to see how they unfold throughout the whole of Scripture.

As we read and study Genesis verse-by-verse, it can be challenging to keep the full story in mind. We need to remember that the elderly and barren Abram and Sarai were promised offspring years before God brought His word to fulfillment in Isaac, through the nation of Israel, and ultimately in the blessing of Christ.<sup>1</sup> The space between God's promise and its immediate fulfillment in Isaac did not just take biblical chapters, it took years in the life of the weary, promise-laden couple. The pressure was building. So was the faith.

At a crucial moment in the story, God brought Abram outside and told him to look into the sky, to number the stars, and to trust Him amidst the building pressure of anxious waiting. God called Abram to number the impossible and to believe the seemingly inconceivable. Genesis 15:6 summarizes Abram's faith powerfully and it also reminds us of what ought to be discernable for each of us who are in Christ. We read that Abram *"believed the Lord, and He counted it to him as righteousness."*<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See Genesis 12:1-9 and Matthew 1:1-17 for reference.

<sup>2</sup> See Genesis 15:6 for reference.



Paul pointed to this moment in the life of Abram when he taught the churches in Galatia, writing, *“Does He who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith— just as Abraham ‘believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness?’”*<sup>3</sup> Later in Galatians 3, Paul explains how Christ redeems people from the law by becoming the curse of the law so that the blessings belonging to Abram might expand beyond his own physical descendants.<sup>4</sup> As such, Christ’s ultimate example of righteousness is universal in its significance.<sup>5</sup> Abram’s rising belief amidst a rising pressures to disbelieve serves as an example for each of us who are in Christ.

When we believe in Christ as our Lord and Savior, His perfection is imputed—or credited—to us and our sin is imputed to Him. In this, God’s demand for perfect righteousness is satisfied by the crediting of Christ’s flawless righteousness to us.<sup>6</sup> Our faith, therefore, cannot be seen as a crowing merit on our behalf, but as a readiness to accept what God has promised and fulfilled in Himself.<sup>7</sup> Abram certainly is not sinless, but his example does serve as a reminder of how faith can grow even as pressure increases.

**BIG IDEA: Abram’s faith amidst pressure serves as an example of genuine trust and imputed righteousness.**

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<sup>3</sup> See Galatians 3:5-6 for reference.

<sup>4</sup> See Galatians 3:13-14 for reference.

<sup>5</sup> See Romans 5:12-19 for reference to this idea from the fall narrative in Genesis 3 to Christ.

<sup>6</sup> See I Timothy 1:15-16, I Peter 1:8-9, Revelation 5:9, Galatians 2:21, and Romans 8:3 for reference.

<sup>7</sup> For an expression of this idea in view of Genesis 15 and Romans 4:11, see Derek Kidner’s work on Abram’s life.

**APPLY:**

- **Question:** Have you ever noticed your faith increase as the pressures of life increases? If so, detail that experience to share how God grew and shaped you.
  
- **Activity:** Pray that God would help you to trust Him in very specific areas of your life. List them below and pray for them unambiguously.
  
- **Optional Activity:** Read the entirety of Galatians 3 and write down how this chapter helps you to see Genesis 15 rightly.



## **Week 6: Genesis 15:1-21**

### **Day 3: How can I know?**

**READ: Genesis 15:1-21 (Specifically focused on vv. 7-8)**

#### **EXPLORE:**

In yesterday's study we saw that Abram believe God. For that reason and nothing else, God counted him as righteous. What an amazing verse and a cornerstone of our relationship with God.

This is followed in verse 7 by a further description of the covenant that the Lord was establishing with Abram describing a specifically identifiable land that would be linked to Abram's already promised descendants. This covenant was presented in a formal format used at the time beginning with a self-identification, "*I am the Lord,*" continuing with a brief history "*who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans,*" and completing the covenant "*to give you this land and to take possession of it.*" Interestingly, it is a format we will see repeated In Exodus 20 when God provides the Ten Commandments. In a time before attorneys, notary publics, and such, covenants were used like contracts.

In verse 8, just 2 verses after being counted as righteous just for his faith, Abram seems to be asking a rather bold question to the Lord about how he will know that he will inherit the land. But perhaps it's not so bold. Abram's relationship with the Lord had been developing since Genesis 12 and he's been promised a great nation and now a land, but he hasn't seen any descendants at this point. Now, God presents His covenant to Abram in the form of what we would see today as a contract. In that light, it may not seem so forward for Abram to ask for a guarantee as he does in verse 8, "*Sovereign Lord, how can I know that I will gain*

*possession of it.*" This desire for confirming a covenant is consistent with tomorrow's verses and the remainder of Genesis 15 when the Lord uses a sacrifice to confirm His covenant with Abram. This would be like signing a contract between two parties today.

Perhaps what originally seemed bold can actually be described as a man that has a real and solid relationship with the Lord. For Abram, interfacing with the Lord is part of his reality and so he does it in real and practical ways. In affect saying, we're going to put a covenant in place so we're going to check all of the boxes just like we would do with a contract today. Abram is not dealing with God just in church on Sundays but in his everyday life with everyday things like his future depends on it, because it does. We have a lot to learn from this reality and his example.

**BIG IDEA: God expanded His covenant with Abram. In response, Abram, being motivated by his faith, wants to know that it is real.**

**APPLY:**

- **Question:** In Abram's position would you have asked God to confirm His covenant? Why or why not?
- **Question:** Do you feel that you deal with God in real world situations and expect real responses? If not, how do you get to a position where you do?

## Week 6: Genesis 15:1-21

### Day 4: Making Sense of Genesis 15

**READ: Genesis 15:1-21 and Jeremiah 34:17-22**

#### EXPLORE:

In Genesis 15 God has Abram bring a heifer, a goat, a ram, a turtledove and a pigeon in order to create the covenant ceremony as evidence to Abram that his descendants will inherit the land of Canaan. In Jeremiah 34 a similar covenant ceremony is discussed, and we are given insight into the significance of that ceremony. The divided animals the participants walk between signify the potential fate of someone who would break the covenant. "*Their dead bodies shall be meat for all the birds of heaven and beasts of the earth.*"<sup>8</sup>

While the covenant ceremony of Jeremiah 34 is similar to the ceremony of Genesis 15, it is important to note that only God's presence in the form of a smoking oven and burning torch passes between the pieces of the animals. Just like the covenant of God with Noah in Genesis 9 it is initiated by God and is one-sided in its promises. God has given the land of Canaan to Abram's descendants. Abram was told that his descendants would be "*strangers in a land that is not theirs, and serve them, and they will afflict them for four hundred years.*"<sup>9</sup> We know that the land will be Egypt, and that the nation of Israel will follow a similar path to their patriarch in the years to come. Just as when Abram entered Egypt, and God plagued the Pharaoh, God will again send plagues to Egypt to help free Abraham's descendants. Then God will lead Abram's descendants to the land promised to them as a

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<sup>8</sup> See Jeremiah 34:20 for reference.

<sup>9</sup> See Genesis 15:13 for reference.

pillar of clouds and fire just as God passed through the pieces of the sacrificed animals as a smoking oven and burning torch.

It is important to remember that God often makes his covenants and promises to us in a one-sided fashion. He is always faithful to His promises and, in this case, did not ask that Abram walk between the pieces to ensure His faithfulness to the patriarch.

Sometimes it is difficult to see what God is doing in our lives, but we know that God has a plan. Abram's descendants were promised the land of Canaan and were granted it long after the covenant was made. Remember that God's time is not always our time, but He is always faithful.

**BIG IDEA: God is often one-sided his covenants. He is always faithful in His promises**

**APPLY:**

- **Question:** How does the covenant described in Genesis 15 compare to the Noahic covenant (Genesis 9) or the covenant described in Jeremiah 34?
- **Question:** The promise made to Abraham that his descendants would inherit the land of Canaan was not fulfilled for a long time. Are there any examples in your own life of God delivering on long-term prayer requests or petitions?

## **Week 6: Genesis 15:1-21**

### **Day 5: When God Seems Delayed**

**READ TOGETHER: Psalm 40:17, Habakkuk 2:3, Psalm 27:14**

***Instructions:*** We believe that Biblical study and spiritual growth are meant to be shared. This Word to Life has that exact focus in mind. For some, Day 5 might be a good opportunity to lead your family in a devotional. For others, this study might serve as a simple reminder to tactfully communicate your faith with those around you. Regardless, Day 5 of each week is designed to help you grow in your faith by sharing it with others.

### **EXPLORE TOGETHER:**

One of the most frustrating things to hear while traveling by plane or train is that there is a delay. We are often excited about arriving at our destination or we have a scheduled meeting that we can no longer attend. Delays are frustrating, but we know well that they are a normal part of life. What about delays in our faith? Does God delay? This is the question that Abram has on his mind after he rescued Lot. This is the dynamic of the story I (Sabino) would like to explore in today's Word to Life study.

God appeared to Abram in a vision and reaffirmed His promise to him. God reaffirmed His promise at just the right time and when Abram needed it the most. You see Abram had just defeated a bunch of kings in the area. He is now considered a military threat and there is a good chance he fears for his life. This is why God's first words to him are "fear not" and that "He is his shield." God will protect Abram against military forces and his reward will be great. This means that Abram will have a child, a great name, and a nation that will come through his seed.

Abram believed God that he would receive a reward, but he didn't know what kind of reward it will be since he is still without a son.



God promised that he would have a son from his own loins. God also had Abram go outside and look at the stars as a picture of the innumerable descendants that he would have. Even though it may seem like it, we need to notice that God's promises were not delayed to Abram.

Abram simply needed to wait for God's timing. The land God promised to give to Abram's descendants would not come for another 400 years. God is never late. Abram just needed to learn to wait. Sometimes in our Christian life we can feel that God has delayed His word to us. But what can seem like delays to us are only appointed times of testing. If we knew when God was going to act and how He was going to act, we would have no need to trust Him. God is never delayed because He never makes mistakes. May we learn to trust Him especially when we must wait.

**BIG IDEA: God is never delayed. We simply must wait on the Lord.**

**APPLY TOGETHER:**

- **Question:** What do you think God wants to teach us when we have to wait on Him?
  
- **Activity:** Share a time you thought God was delayed and how it turned out better than you could have hoped for.

## Week 7: Genesis 16:1-16

### Day 1: Exploring the Biblical Text

**READ: Genesis 16:1-16**

#### **EXPLORE:**

Instructions: Spend time reading Genesis and complete the activities and questions below.

- **Activity:** While reading, include some observations in the space below.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- **Question:** What was Sarai's dilemma in vv. 1-2 and how did she think her problem would be resolved?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- **Question:** What do you notice about Abram and Sarai's response to Hagar's pregnancy?

- **Question:** How are the actions of the angel of the Lord contrasted with the actions of Abram and Sarai?
  
- **Question:** What do we learn about God's character in the way that Hagar is cared for and issued a promise of multiplication?
  
- **Question:** Sarai and Abram's sinful actions in Genesis 16 expose the ways in which our standards go wrong when we don't follow God's design and give in to our own desperation. In what ways do you need to trust God amidst the "desperation" of life in a world beset with sin?

## **Week 7: Genesis 16:1-16**

### **Day 2: Has God indeed made you a promise?**

**READ: Genesis 16:1-16**

#### **EXPLORE:**

Considering the promises God had made to her husband Abram, Sarai must have felt the weight of the responsibility to conceive, which had fallen hard upon her. Wrong thinking, yet understandable grief of barrenness, resulted in her flesh compelling her to “do something.” God’s first promises to Abram gave no mention of Sarai being the one to give birth; however, we know that God’s intention for marriage was one man and one woman, for life. Sarai, in her desperation, decided the answer to her empty womb would be to offer Hagar to Abram in order to conceive this promised child. In Abram and Sarai’s decisions in this matter, not once do we learn of them consulting with God, in prayer. The flesh had its way and sin was birthed.

When God makes a promise, and in this case, a covenant, you can be sure that God will fulfill that promise all by Himself. Of course, we have the luxury of hindsight with Abram and Sarai. But do we learn from their mistakes? I (Leeanna) think... Probably not. As the Scripture says, the seed promised to Abram was The Seed, which is Christ.<sup>10</sup> Abram believed in the LORD, and He counted it to him for righteousness. But the longer the promise of a seed was delayed, the more time the flesh had to set itself against the Spirit. Abram believed God’s promise that he would be the father of an heir from his own loins. How God would accomplish this was not made known to Abram, however. Sarai and Abram both agreed to use the flesh to accomplish God’s will. In doing so, they departed from God’s design for the marriage bed, and they committed sin. This sin would hurt many people, including the bondwoman, named Hagar. Since she was a slave, she presumably would have had no choice but to do as she was told.

So, what is the point of God’s promises being delayed? For one thing, it is not for us to know when and how God will make good on His word. It

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<sup>10</sup> See Galatians 3:16 for contextual reference.

should be enough for us to know that God keeps the promises He makes, because He is not a man that He would lie. When God makes a promise, it is to His discretion to decide how and when He will bring it to pass. Many times, God will make a promise and then our flesh immediately goes about trying to make it manifest. Not only are we not the promise giver, but we are also not the promise doer. In Abram's case, this promise of a son would lead to the grander fulfillment of The Promised One to come. The One who was to be born at the appointed time—not just at any time. In the fullness of time, God brought forth His Son. Abram and Sarai's waiting had purpose, it wasn't random or delayed; it was in God's perfect order that they should wait upon Him. Abram and Sarai's desperation was not what moved God to act. God's wisdom and timing trumped all of their plans.

Often, we think God's promises only concern us because we tend to be self-centered individuals. God is always looking to the betterment of all. When we narrow God's promises as just for us alone, we lose sight of how big our God's heart is for others, including future heirs of salvation in Christ. Many God-fearing believers have tried to accomplish God's revealed will in their own ways. Leaving God out of the equation is never a good or right idea. Whatever a person attempts to do without God, in the flesh, will fail at a miserable level. God's purposes will always prevail.

**BIG IDEA: If God has indeed made you a promise, wait patiently for Him to fulfill it.**

**APPLY:**

- **Question:** Do you believe God has failed you by not yet keeping His promises to you? Have you prayed and asked God if that promise was directed to you and for you?
- **Activity:** Sometimes we assume God has failed us when He never made the promise to us to begin with. Read the following questions for additional help with discernment.

- 1) Could it be that a person misspoke a promise with a “Thus sayeth the LORD?” Have you spent time with God in prayer and in His Word for confirmation?
- 2) If you have claimed a promise in the Bible, have you considered its context? Is there a condition to that promise? Was the promise in the Bible to a particular person or a people group? Were there certain boundaries in place for the promise to be fulfilled? Would you be willing to seek wise counsel about this promise?
- 3) Have you considered whether you are sinfully trying to fulfill what God has promised, but not in ways that God would approve? Remember that if God wills something, it will be accomplished. Be joyful in service amidst the waiting.



## Week 7: Genesis 16:1-16

### Day 3: The God Who Sees

**READ: Genesis 16:1-16**

#### **EXPLORE:**

There is a women's prison in Texas City that I (Cean) volunteer at weekly. This facility is also a medical unit, so the women I interact with are dealing with various physical ailments in addition to their incarceration. Every week, without fail, someone will thank us for going out there because the truth is these women are largely forgotten by society, their friends, and their family. It means so much to them to know that someone cares and reminds them that they are not alone.

There are over 50 names for God in Holy Scripture, all which describe a particular characteristic trait about Him. The name found in this section<sup>11</sup> is 'El Roi' which means, "*The God who sees.*" This is the only time in Scripture that someone gave God a name and He kept it. The absolutely beautiful part is that it was given to Him by a societal nobody, an Egyptian slave girl whom Abram and Sarai don't even call by name. Hagar was overlooked, used, rejected, and run off. She was hurting and feeling alone, not unlike the inmates that I see every week. However, feelings are not facts, and although she felt alone, she was not. The Angel of the Lord found her in the wilderness. She wasn't looking for Him; He pursued her. Hallelujah!

This is one of the many anthropomorphisms in the Bible. God doesn't have physical eyes, but He does see it all as we read in Proverbs 15:3. Maybe you are struggling in the wilderness right now feeling isolated, hopeless, cornered, or rejected. Everyday is painful or hard to endure; doubt and fear overwhelm you, but God sees you, beloved. He is drawn to the brokenhearted and will show up in the middle of nowhere to remind you that He cares for you. El Roi, the God who sees, is searching for you when nobody else is. Our God wants us to know Him because we were created to have a relationship with Him, especially the slave, prisoner, foreigner, and outcast.

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<sup>11</sup> See v. 13 for reference.



We see a shift in Hagar when she encountered El Roi. Her circumstances didn't change, but she saw something in God in the midst of her pain and suffering. She saw that God sees her hurt, her heart, and her hope. He saw a blessing when she could not. She just needed to walk in obedience to get it.<sup>12</sup>

Listen Christian, God knows what we need in every season of our life. He is at work in ways we may not fully understand, but this story reminds us to trust God in spite of our circumstances. Jesus sees us in our storm.<sup>13</sup> El Roi sees our future. He sees how it will work out. Maybe you are like Hagar or the inmates right now, hurting, feeling rejected, or fearful of what the future holds. I want to encourage you that God's goodness outweighs your pain. We find peace in Jesus, because we will not find it in the brokenness of the world.<sup>14</sup> El Roi sees you. He calls you by name. He hears your cries and has a plan for you.

**BIG IDEA: We may not see it, but God does. Walk by faith and not by sight.**

**APPLY:**

- **Question and Activity:** How would answer the question, "What are you fighting for or running from in your life?" Once you have thought and prayed about this question from your past or in your present, submit areas of your life evermore to the Lord and His care.
  
- **Challenge:** Do a study on the names of God. Spend some time in prayer praising Him for who He is.

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<sup>12</sup> See vv. 10-16 for context and reference.

<sup>13</sup> See Mark 6:45-51 for an example.

<sup>14</sup> See John 16:33 for reference.



## **Week 7: Genesis 16:1-16**

### **Day 4: Who is the angel and why does it matter?**

**READ: Genesis 16:1-16**

#### **EXPLORE:**

The brutality of Genesis 16 has often been unjustifiably domesticated by contemporary readers of Scripture. We can regularly and ignorantly sterilize or willingly overlook how awfully Abram and Sarai treated Hagar. To be clear, in Genesis 16 tells the story of a slave woman who becomes pregnant by her master, abused by his wife, and forced to flee into the desert to likely encounter her demise. As the story unfolds, it becomes clear that although Abram and Sarai treated Hagar and Ishmael dreadfully, God had not forgotten the vulnerable. Despite her desperate situation, the angel somewhat surprisingly promised an abundant blessing of many descendants to Hagar as well.<sup>15</sup> The appearance of the angel and the promise that ensues begs the question, who exactly is the angel and why is it significant?

People have consistently and vehemently disagreed about the identity of the angel of the Lord in Genesis 16. Some have asserted that the angel is the pre-incarnate second person of the Trinity. Others assert that this angel of the Lord is a heavenly being, but not a part of the triune Godhead. In the limited space that follows, I (Stephen) would like to briefly step into those mirky waters and address this question and any implications that follow.

For those who assert that the angel of the Lord was the pre-incarnate second person of the Trinity, the argument is often based upon a few different factors. First, proponents of this view point to the fact that typically God alone issues the kind of

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<sup>15</sup> We read that the angel of the Lord found her by a spring. While there, she received a promise of multiplication for her offspring.

blessing that Hagar receives about abundant offspring.<sup>16</sup> Second, proponents of this view also point to Hagar's response to the promise as evidence. Notably, we read that Hagar "*called the name of the Lord who spoke to her, 'You are the God who sees me.'*"

Those who assert that the angel was a heavenly being, but not the pre-incarnate Son of God also have evidence that they believe supports their view. First, the New Testament never makes the identification of the second person of the Trinity with the angelic appearance. Second, Genesis 16 is very similar to the angelic announcement of Jesus' birth in Luke 1. To be clear, the Lukan angelic appearance is not thought of as the pre-incarnate Christ. Third, the Ancient Near Eastern contexts often treated the royal messenger as a surrogate of the king with corresponding levels of authority. This assertion seems to make sense of Hagar's response to the angel's promise.

Interestingly and revealingly, this debate about the identity of the angel has gained more momentum today than it did in historic Christianity. This seems to indicate that the historical interpreters of the Bible cared less about the specific and somewhat unknown identity of the messenger than they did with the message. This matters, friends! My brief encouragement would be to ask profound and nuanced questions of the biblical text. Study deeply, but not in a way that compromises the main idea or your call to corresponding action. You and I need to resist the temptation to miss the main point of a biblical text in the pursuit of an ancillary detail.

Whether the angel is the Lord Himself or simply identified directly with God, Genesis 16 makes it clear that the messenger is in alignment with God's will. The central idea of the text does not

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<sup>16</sup> See Genesis 22, 26, and 28 for reference.

change. The mercy of God has been extended to the vulnerable and exiled mother.

**BIG IDEA: Despite her despair, God was abundantly gracious to Hagar.**

**APPLY:**

- **Question:** Sometimes we can become preoccupied by a side point in such a way that we either miss the main idea or are kept from biblical obedience. Have you ever noticed this reality in life and faith? How have you learned to balance this tension?
  
- **Optional Activity:** Although I am not fully endorsing the articles detailed below, you may find the conversations valuable as you continue to study the subject at hand.
  - Article: [Who is the Angel of the Lord](#) by Carissa Quinn of the Bible Project
  - Article: [Who is the Angel of the Lord](#) by Got Questions
  - Article: [Where is the Trinity in the Old Testament](#) by Alastair Roberts of Desiring God



## **Week 7: Genesis 16:1-16**

### **Day 5: God has seen me...**

**READ TOGETHER: Psalm 139:1-6, 1 John 4:19, Revelation 22:1-5**

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### **EXPLORE TOGETHER:**

Does God only look towards us after we have looked towards Him? Are we the initiators in our relationship with God or is He the initiator?

It is easy to have a performance mindset when it comes to our relationship with God. It is tempting to believe that God will only look after us when we have been on our best behavior. If we have sinned, we might believe that God looks away. But Sarai, Abram, and Hagar all sinned in our story today and God in His grace was there to look after them all.

Sarai grew impatient waiting on the promise of the Lord. They had been in Canaan for ten years and still there was no sign of a son. She wrongfully offered Abram her servant Hagar. Abram wrongfully agreed to the offer. Abram acted like Adam when he listened to Eve in the garden as he took the forbidden fruit. Hagar sinned when she looked with contempt on Sarai after she conceived. This means that Hagar boasted that she was able to get pregnant when Sarai was unable. This led to Hagar fleeing the family after Sarai treated her harshly.

Sin had made a complete mess of things. Thankfully, God knows how to forgive us of our sins and clean up our mess.

After Hagar fled, the angel of the Lord found her. God was the initiator and the restorer of their mess. The angel of the Lord told Hagar to return to Sarai and submit to her. The angel of the Lord promised her that He would multiply her offspring and He prophesied what her son Ishmael would be like.

Hagar responded to the Lord by calling Him the God who sees. Not only did God see her but she also saw Him. It is wonderful to think about how God sees us to care for us. But it is even more wonderful to think about how one day we will see Him. When Christ returns at the end of the age, we will see Him face to face. We will be able to say like Hagar, *“Truly here I have seen Him who looks after me.”*

**BIG IDEA: Like a shepherd, God takes care of His sheep even after they have sinned.**

**APPLY TOGETHER:**

- **Activity:** List some other passages of Scripture that makes it clear that God sees and looks after us.
  
- **Question:** Why do you think it is more important to see God rather than to be seen by Him?



## **Week 8: Genesis 17:1-14**

### **Day 1: Exploring the Biblical Text**

#### **READ: Genesis 17:1-14**

#### **EXPLORE:**

*Instructions:* Spend time reading Genesis and complete the activities and questions below.

- **Activity:** While reading, include some observations in the space below.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- **Question:** Abram is renamed in v. 5. Why was his renaming significant?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- **Question:** In Genesis 12, God had promised Abram a blessing. Why might it be significant that God reiterated and expanded His previous promise once again?

- **Question:** What was the sign of the covenant given to Abram and his descendants?
  
- **Activity:** In this week's study of God's Word, we will briefly explore the ideas of circumcision of the heart and the connection between circumcision and baptism. Using a physical or online concordance, begin to study how these themes are unpacked in Scripture. (*Hint: Jeremiah, Romans, I Corinthians, Galatians, and Colossians will prove valuable.*)

## Week 8: Genesis 17:1-14

### Day 2: The Investment of Obedience

**READ: Genesis 17:1-14**

#### **EXPLORE:**

Have you ever missed an opportunity to invest in something that would have paid off later on? When I (Lucas) was a teenager in the late 90's, I learned about a startup internet search engine that was different from all of the others. Though relatively unknown, I was impressed with their unique approach to browsing the new frontier called the World Wide Web. Suspecting that they would be a success, I watched with anticipation when they announced taking the company public and offering the option to buy stocks. Had I had extra funds available, I would have invested in this company named Google. What a missed opportunity!

We often miss the opportunity to receive God's full blessing because we do not invest obedience in our relationship with Him. In Genesis 17, we see continued development of what covenant relationship with God looks like. In this passage we see how the unchanging nature of God interacts with the free will He has given to mankind. God's promises are undergirded by the unmovable nature of His character. We refer to this unmovable nature as God's *immutability*. At the same time, God allows our walk with Him and obedience to Him to impact the measure of blessing we receive in our relationship with Him.

The previous chapter ends with a child, Ishmael, being born from the sinful disobedience of Abram and Sarai. When chapter 17 begins, the narrative skips 13 years ahead. We don't know exactly what happened during this time, but we do know that the next time Scripture records God speaking to Abram after his massive failure He reminds him of who He is, what He expects, and what He has promised. God tells him to "*walk before me*" and to "*be blameless.*"<sup>17</sup> Walking before God means to live in step with God. It speaks of a desire to remain in God's presence with no attempt to keep anything secret. Being blameless

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<sup>17</sup> See Genesis 17:1 for reference.

deals with a devotion to fulfilling the purposes of God. It involves an obedience that is initiated and sustained by love and commitment.

If we're not careful, we will see God's mandates to walk before Him and be blameless as sacrifices that we have to make at the expense of things that we would rather do. Instead, we should see them as opportunities to invest in the work of God, knowing that it produces greater rewards than we could imagine, rewards that begin in this life and stretch into eternity. We should also recognize God's commands as loving protection of His children from things that will harm them, just as human parents lovingly protect their children by the boundaries they set for them.

When Google went public, I was convinced I didn't have any money to invest. Had I known then what I know now, I would have sold and saved all that I could to make sure I didn't miss the opportunity of a lifetime. How much more should we sacrifice and invest our lives for God's purposes that will outlast our lifetimes?

**BIG IDEA: We often miss the opportunity to receive God's full blessing due to not investing obedience in our relationship with Him.**

**APPLY:**

- **Question:** Is there a difference between sacrifice and investment when it comes to participating in God's promises?
- **Question:** What act of obedience do you immediately see in this passage after God's reassurance of His covenant with Abram?
- **Question:** How does verse 14 reinforce the correlation between obedience and blessing within God's covenant?

## **Week 8: Genesis 17:1-14**

### **Day 3: Salvific Ripple Effects of the Abrahamic Covenant**

**READ: Genesis 17:1-14 and Romans 4**

#### **EXPLORE:**

The biblical text we have been studying this week is a powerfully clear restatement concerning the expansive nature of God's blessing to and through Abraham. The promise that was given in Genesis 12 and reiterated in Genesis 15 is expanded here in Genesis 17. God's assurance of land, offspring, and blessing has not ceased despite Abraham's impatient sinfulness evidenced with Hagar. The everlasting blessing we are studying this week is a potent reminder that God honors His covenants. He always keeps His word.

In order to appreciate this passage, we need to see it in the scope of Scripture's larger narrative. When the Apostle Paul wrote about the Abrahamic Covenant, he readily connected the blessing with non-Jews (Gentiles) who would also become inheritors of this promise because of their faith in God's grace.<sup>18</sup> Unlike Genesis 15, the promises here pertain to how Abraham and his descendants will be made into a blessing to the nations.<sup>19</sup> Through both physical and spiritual progeny, Abraham will become the father of a multitude.<sup>20</sup> Romans 4 is perhaps one of the best places to see the salvific ripple effects of the Abrahamic Covenant for us today. If you have not done so already, spend time reading Romans 4. In fact, I (Stephen) have decided to intentionally shorten today's study in order to give you intentional time to meditate on the way Romans 4 picks up Genesis 17.

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<sup>18</sup> See also Psalm 87 and Galatians 3 for continued expansion on this topic.

<sup>19</sup> See Genesis 12:3 for the origins of this idea which is certainly true in Genesis 15 although it is not the main focus.

<sup>20</sup> See Nehemiah for an exploration of the covenantal language of Genesis 15-17.

*What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh? <sup>2</sup>For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. <sup>3</sup>For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness." <sup>4</sup>Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. <sup>5</sup>And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness, <sup>6</sup>just as David also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works: <sup>7</sup>"Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; <sup>8</sup>blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin." <sup>9</sup>Is this blessing then only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised? For we say that faith was counted to Abraham as righteousness. <sup>10</sup>How then was it counted to him? Was it before or after he had been circumcised? It was not after, but before he was circumcised. <sup>11</sup>He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. The purpose was to make him the father of all who believe without being circumcised, so that righteousness would be counted to them as well, <sup>12</sup>and to make him the father of the circumcised who are not merely circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised. <sup>13</sup>For the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith. <sup>14</sup>For if it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null, and the promise is void. <sup>15</sup>For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law there is no transgression. <sup>16</sup>That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring—not only to the adherent of the law but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all, <sup>17</sup>as it is written, "I have made you the father of many nations"—in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist.*

**BIG IDEA: The God who is so visibly gracious in the Abrahamic Covenant has also been abundantly merciful to us today.**

**APPLY:**

- **Question:** As you read through both Genesis and Romans, what are some significant details that stand out to you and why?
  
- **Question:** In what ways does reading Romans 4 help you better understand Genesis 17?





## Week 8: Genesis 17:1-14

### Day 4: The Significance of Circumcision

**READ: Genesis 17:1-14 (Specifically focusing on vv. 9-14)**

#### **EXPLORE:**

*“This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your offspring after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised.”*—Genesis 17:10

After God made His covenant with Abraham, He commanded him to practice circumcision as the corresponding sign of the promise. It is not coincidental that something associated with procreation was marked for and set apart by God. Because the promise pertained to setting Abraham’s descendants apart to God, the sign of the promise also related to procreation. The Scriptures are clear, though, that the physical sign of the covenant was of no spiritual value unless it was accompanied by a heart that was circumcised by God.<sup>21</sup> A circumcised body and a sinful heart are fundamentally at odds with each other.

Deuteronomy 30:6 explains this concept, writing, *“And the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.”*

Jeremiah 31:33 continues, *“For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people.”*

For Abraham and his descendants, circumcision was a crucial sign of what it meant to be the people of God. It was the Old

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<sup>21</sup> See I Corinthians 7:19 for reference.

Testament's sign of initiation into the covenant community. The New Testament is clear that this sign of initiation into the promise is replaced by the new symbol - baptism. Those who have believed in Christ and have been regenerated by the grace of God are called to accept and receive this sign of the New Covenant—baptism.

The Apostle Paul articulates this idea in Colossians 2:11-12, writing, *“In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead.”* For followers of Jesus today, circumcision has been replaced by baptism as a mark of the covenant community.

Believers who have been transformed by the grace of God still receive circumcision today. It is circumcision and purification of the heart.<sup>22</sup> The necessity of repentance, faith, and inward change are affirmed for God's covenant people in both the Old and New Testaments. As an outward sign of belief in the gospel and as a statement of our desire to live obediently, we are commanded to be publicly baptized as a rite of belonging to the Church.

**BIG IDEA: Baptism is the new sign of the covenant for those whose hearts have been circumcised by God's grace through faith.**

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<sup>22</sup> See Romans 2:29 for reference.

**APPLY:**

- **Activity:** In his commentary on Genesis, Bruce K. Waltke wrote, “Baptism is the symbol of inclusion in Christ’s church, the new expression of God’s covenant people, and the symbol of cleansing of sin.”<sup>23</sup> Read the passages below that Waltke attaches to this assertion.
  - Romans 6:1-14; 11:16; I Corinthians 7:14, Colossians 2:11-12; Philippians 3:20
  
- **Question:** What common misunderstandings of baptism have you encountered?

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<sup>23</sup> See *Genesis: A Commentary* by Bruce K. Waltke, 264 for reference.



## **Week 8: Genesis 17:1-14**

### **Day 5: The Covenant Explained**

**READ TOGETHER: Exodus 6:3, Isaiah 62:2, Romans 9:6-8**

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#### **EXPLORE TOGETHER:**

The Lord has appeared to Abram now multiple times, but this is probably the most important one. Here God changes Abram's name and introduces the covenant of circumcision. It is here that he makes the promise that Abraham and Sarah will have a son named Isaac. This is the time they had been waiting for.

When God appears to Abraham, he is ninety-nine years old. This is thirteen years after his last appearance. Hopefully, this puts into perspective our own time of waiting on the Lord. When the Lord appears, He refers to Himself as God Almighty or El Shaddai. This name communicates the power and all-sufficiency of God. This is exactly what Abram needed to know about God at this time. He and Sarai were old. They needed a God who was all powerful and all-sufficient. A God who found it easy to fulfill His promises.

God not only established His covenant with Abraham, but also with his offspring. He promised them that the land of Canaan would be an everlasting possession and that He would be their God. To be their God is the great promise. What God is, He will be to His people. He will be their wisdom, strength, rest, and so on. They need nothing else, nor anyone else. Their God is the

Almighty, the all-sufficient one. There is no need He cannot meet, no desire He cannot fill.

As for Abraham and his descendants, they were to keep God's covenant through circumcision. Every male among them was to be circumcised. Circumcision is a bloody ordinance because all things of the law were cleansed with blood; it was the flesh of the foreskin that was cut away because it is by ordinary human reproduction that sin is passed on. It also had an eye to the promised seed (Christ), who was to come from the loins of Abraham. This covenant of circumcision pointed to Christ, as He would offer up His own flesh as a blood sacrifice to enter into covenant with us.

**BIG IDEA: The Almighty God makes covenant with Abraham and his offspring.**

**APPLY TOGETHER:**

- **Question:** What do you think is the significance of Abraham having his name changed?
  
- **Question:** Why do you think the punishment of not being circumcised was so severe?







## Week 9: Genesis 17:15-27

### Day 2: What's in a Name?

**READ: Genesis 17:15-22**

#### **EXPLORE:**

I (Sarah Wilson) looked up the most popular names in the world, I was both surprised and not. No need to list them here. I then proceeded to look up the most unpopular names, and it made me laugh, because I'm not sure why this list exists. I would not recommend looking this list up.

Today we take a magnifying glass to a very unique moment in the life of Sarai. It is the moment where God singles her out, examines her life, foresees what is to come, and gives her a brand-new name. Most people see this as God just changing one simple letter, the "I" to an "H". We will read and see just how significant this one letter became, and how this God who changes simple letters also desires to change your lives radically here and now.

First, we need a recap of the life of Sarai in order to understand why God would do such a thing. I am willing to bet we all have a fairly positive view of Sarai, but boy did she make a lot of mistakes. Briefly, starting with Genesis 16, Sarai, out of distress, distrust, and impatience, has Hagar sleep with Abraham so they may have an heir. After Hagar becomes pregnant, Sarai mistreats her, casting her away. Next is Genesis 18:9-15, she laughs at hearing the Lord say she will bear a child, then lies when she is confronted by Him. The next two are well-known stories so I won't go into detail, but see Genesis 20 (the secret sister scandal) and 21.

I've been giving her a hard time, but here's why. God was doing something great, merciful, and most of all big. Genesis 17:15 is the moment where God changes her name from Sarai to Sarah, and in verses 16-17, the *why*. God says to Abraham, *"I will bless her, and moreover, I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall become nations; kings of peoples will come from her."* This is significant! From Sarah, bearing Isaac, comes the tribe of Judah, of which comes the

family line of Christ. So now we see it. He wasn't just changing one letter; He was changing billions of lives.

Have you ever thought about your own name, and what it means? Whether you were named after a biblical character, a cherished family member, or their favorite athlete, your name is loved by God, the one who created you.

Regardless, our names are marred by sin. We are in need of new life, a new purpose, and a new name. A physical name change would be expensive, lots of paperwork, and your family would most likely be offended. Well, I have good news for you. Your heavenly Father offers you a better name change. It's called "My Beloved", "My Chosen One", "Righteousness of God", "Forgiven", and powerfully, "New Creation." When you understand that God sees you as His own, with endless ways to love and sing over you, you will walk in faith—transformed and confident in the knowledge that He has big plans for you. He didn't just change one letter; He changed everything.

**BIG IDEA: When God renames people in the Bible, He gives them a new purpose. God has done the same for those He has saved.**

**APPLY:**

- **Question:** Since you have come to know Christ, does your life look any different? Have you made a significant change, repurposed according to God's desires for you?
  
- **Challenge:** Read Genesis 32:22-32, Matthew 16:13-20 or John 1:41-42, and Acts 13:9 to see other name changes in the Bible. Meditate and evaluate your purpose in Christ and ask God to reveal changes that need to be made. Invite a brother or sister in Christ to offer insight and accountability.

## **Week 9: Genesis 17:15-27**

### **Day 3: Triumph Over Hopelessness**

**READ: Genesis 17:15-27**

#### **EXPLORE:**

How well do you remember what took place twenty-five years ago?

For many, that question may be impossible to answer. For some who are doing this study, you were not yet born. For others, there may be sweet memories associated with the events unfolding a quarter century ago. Allow me (Stephen) to briefly take you twenty-five years in the past, into the wonderful world of 1998. In 1998, the average price of a home was approximately \$150,000. In 1998, Houston had not yet exceeded 2 million residents. In 1998, you could buy a gallon of gas for \$1.15. Needless to say, a lot can change in twenty-five years.

When we read the story of Abram and Sarai, we often fail to comprehend that it will be a quarter of a century comprised of waiting in order to see God's promise of Isaac come to fruition. That is a long time of waiting. That is a long time of wondering. That is a long time to continually fight in order to maintain hope. The promise of Isaac to an elderly, barren couple represents the living God's triumph over hopelessness that, at times, seems to have overrun our world.

According to His own will and sovereign purposes, God reassured both Abram and Sarai, who were renamed Abraham and Sarah, with the promise of a boy to be called Isaac. One thing is abundantly clear for the ancient audiences and for us today. The severity and length of their waiting served to accentuate the tenacious faithfulness and supernatural provision of God alone. Simply and obviously, Isaac's birth is miraculous. The promise and

its fulfillment are potent reminders of a truth we encounter all throughout the Scriptures. The Lord's people do not come about by natural generation, but by supernatural power in accordance with a supernatural grace.

Look at how Paul explains this moment from Genesis 17. He writes, *"But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but 'Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.' This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring. For this is what the promise said: 'About this time next year I will return, and Sarah shall have a son.'"*

For Abraham and Sarah, a lot changed in twenty-five years of waiting. God's faithfulness and the certainty of His promises were not subject to change, however. Ultimately, Isaac's birth represents a God-given triumph over hopelessness.<sup>24</sup> The promise of Genesis 17, therefore, is an invitation to trust in the promise-keeping God amidst the seemingly hopeless situations in life.

**BIG IDEA: In view of Isaac's birth, the promise of Genesis 17 is a reminder of God's supernatural provision amidst the seemingly hopeless situations of life.**

**APPLY:**

- **Question:** Where in your life do you need to trust God more? Spend some time writing down those areas and committing to pray about them together.

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<sup>24</sup> See Genesis 21 for reference.

## **Week 9: Genesis 17:15-27**

### **Day 4: Immediate Obedience**

**READ: Genesis 17:15-27**

#### **EXPLORE:**

When God required every male in Abraham's household to be circumcised, Abraham immediately obeyed. Every male in Abraham's household was circumcised, that very day.<sup>25</sup> Although Abraham had only one son at the time, there were hundreds of men in his household.<sup>26</sup> Following circumcision, these men had to rest and heal for several days. Surely, they already had other plans that week. While it would have been tempting for Abraham to wait until a more convenient time, Abraham chose to cancel their plans and obey God immediately.

Not only was this mass circumcision inconvenient, it was also risky. For comparison, Simeon and Levi tricked the Shechemites to get circumcised all at once so that they would be too sore to defend their city.<sup>27</sup> It follows that Abraham's men would have been too sore to defend his household and possessions from any marauders. It could have seemed more practical to stagger the circumcisions so that some men could defend the camp while others were recovering. Abraham may have also wondered if his men would comply, or if mutiny might result. But God had given the orders, so Abraham obeyed immediately. He trusted God to defend him, as the Lord had promised, "*Fear not, Abram, I am your shield.*"<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> See Genesis 17:23 for reference.

<sup>26</sup> See Genesis 14:14 for reference.

<sup>27</sup> See Genesis 34:24-25 for reference.

<sup>28</sup> See Genesis 15:1 for reference.

So too, we must not wait for a convenient time to obey God. Jesus declared, *“No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.”*<sup>29</sup> Paul wrote, *“We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God... behold, now is the day of salvation.”*<sup>30</sup> Have you turned from sin and trusted in Christ as your savior? Do not put it off. Receive forgiveness and new life in Christ today. Is there a sin you’re holding onto, which you know you need to confess? Do not delay. Put that sin to death today, receiving forgiveness through Jesus’ blood.

Parents, do your children obey you right away, or do they take their sweet time? It is our responsibility to discipline our children lovingly and prayerfully, so they learn to obey right away. Delayed obedience is disobedience. Unmarried Christian couple, are you taking your sweet time to decide about marriage? Are you engaged, but with a wedding date in the distant future? *“If they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion.”*<sup>31</sup> This passion is a gift designed by God specifically for marriage. As a couple, if you struggle in this area, the path of obedience may mean getting on the fast-track to marriage, with much prayer and godly counsel.

**BIG IDEA: Do not delay obeying God, even if it interferes with your own plans.**

**APPLY:**

- **Question:** In what specific way do you need to obey God right away?

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<sup>29</sup> See Luke 9:62 for reference.

<sup>30</sup> See 2 Corinthians 5:20 - 6:2 for reference.

<sup>31</sup> See 1 Corinthians 7:9 for reference.

- **Question:** What inhibits you from obeying God right away?
  
- **Activity:** If there's something in this study which pricked your conscience but you're not sure what obedience looks like, discuss with a wise Christian who may have experience in this area.
  - You could also read a book like "Shepherding a Child's Heart" by Paul Tripp or "Pre-Engagement: Five Questions to Ask Yourselves" by David Powlison and John Yenchko.





## **Week 9: Genesis 17:15-27**

### **Day 5: Isaac is Promised through Sarah**

**READ TOGETHER: Romans 4:19-25, Hebrews 11:11-12**

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### **EXPLORE TOGETHER:**

Just as God changed Abram's name, He also changed Sarai's name. The promises He made to Abraham He also made to Sarah. God had promised Abraham a son for a while now, but this is the first time He explicitly says his son will come through Sarah.

Abraham responded by falling on his face and laughing. This was not a mocking laugh, but one of joy and delight. Abraham was genuinely surprised that God would give a son to a hundred-year-old man and a ninety-year-old woman. Then Abraham said to God, "Oh, that Ishmael might live before you." Seemingly Abraham was asking if the promise could come through Ishmael. God quickly rebukes him and says that the promise will come through Sarah. It is with Isaac that God will establish His everlasting covenant and at this time next year Sarah will bear him.

Abraham knew he had a short amount of time before the promise would be fulfilled. So, he acted quickly, and he was circumcised that very day with all the males in his household. Abraham obeyed God in complete obedience like Noah before him. Abraham's obedience to circumcision was evidence of his faith in

the promises of God. We can see he was eager to accomplish the will of God as we also ought to be.

God made a promise to Abraham of a miraculous birth of a baby boy. Thousands of years later God would make a promise to a virgin named Mary of a miraculous birth of a baby boy. There would be much laughter and rejoicing at the birth of this baby as well. Jesus is the ultimate fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham. Isaac was a precious son, but Jesus is God's only Son.

**BIG IDEA: Abraham and Sarah are not too old to have a son.**

**APPLY TOGETHER:**

- **Activity:** Name as many kings as you can that would come through Abraham and Sarah.
  
- **Question:** Why do you think God waited for so long before fulfilling the promise to Abraham and Sarah?



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